

**“COMMUNITY FORESTRY” – A STRATEGY AND A TOOL
FOR SOCIAL EQUILIBRIUM AND COMMUNITY
REINTEGRATION
IN SRI LANKAN RURAL SOCIETY**

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Sri Lanka Community Forestry Program (SLCFP) has evolved significantly since its inception in 2003. A qualitative study of community commitment to project activities and forest conservation was conducted at 20 of the 167 SLCFP sites, implemented during 2013-16. Data-gathering and analysis followed the case study method using observation, focus group discussions, and key-informant interviews as data-collecting techniques.

The rural communities in dry and intermediate zones in Sri Lanka are highly dependent upon agriculture, primarily as a subsistence economy for their domestic use. *Chena* [*Hena*] or shifting cultivation is one of the key agricultural patterns in village subsistence economy and is a practice central to many social and cultural factors of villagers' lives. Thus, *Hena* cultivation has very strong roots in the livelihoods and lifeways of villagers. The Colonial Administration banned *Hena* cultivation in 1896 with the introduction of the Waste Lands Ordinance, but it was continued under government permits as an integral part of village social and cultural life. Subsequently, the Forest Department (FD) has continued demarcation of forest boundaries for forest protection. At the same time, villagers' attitudes and patterns of economic activities have changed recently towards more commercial agriculture. These changes have had an enormous impact in *Hena* cultivation too and some villagers have used large forest areas for cultivation. Therefore, the forest degradation and deforestation level has increased substantially. The FD and other government administrators have faced many issues and challenges in controlling forest degradation and deforestation in the dry and intermediate zones of Sri Lanka.

The study found that the SLCFP has become a strategy and a tool for enhancing social equilibrium and reintegration in different ways among communities that became detached from their environments. The program provides them a platform to enjoy their historic nostalgia of *Hena* cultivation, continue some commercially viable crops/plants and get a good seasonal income, but within the limits of reforestation and forest enrichment activities. Within the SLCFP, villagers plan their home garden and income-generation activities, and improve community infrastructure. The SLCFP is increasing community sentiments towards forest conservation, reforestation, and environmental safeguards.

Key Words: *Community forestry, Social equilibrium, Re-integration, Hena cultivation*